UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA CROOKSTON
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Torchlight eNewsletter - Spring/May 2021

Torchlight is a companion publication of the Torch for alumni and friends of UMN Crookston.

Spring greetings, alumni and friends,

Spring has sprung graduations everywhere and these anticipated events bring a slew of emotions and reasons to celebrate. The graduate, perhaps it's a breath of relief and feeling of exaltation cemented together creating an outburst of one giant "YAHOO!" The educators, it may be pressure mixed with a sense of progress, knowing there was something they had a hand in, impacting the lives and futures of each of those who walk across the physical or virtual stage. The family members, especially parents, grandparents, and guardians, who thought this day would be long in its reach, unknowingly experience a collective "eye blink" and without a moment to pause (please slow down time!) witness loved ones adorned in all the appropriate garb, scramble to the stage to gather well sought diplomas. The friend or mentor, who from the sidelines may have been silently (or loudly) cheering them on, rooting for their absolute best in order to confirm they were truly going to be ok (they ARE going to be OK; whew ... exhale).

On May 8, our newest alumni of the University of Minnesota Crookston joined online and in person for one of two ceremonies celebrating our 2021 and 2020 graduating classes. Sitting near the entrance of Lysaker gymnasium, I had the pleasure of watching the degree earners walk in, among them several University and Alumni Relations interns/student assistants. As they entered, we shared waves, thumbs up, virtual hugs,

and “masked smiles” all the while my heart raced with pride. In an earlier Torchlight, I shared how difficult and emotional it can be when we say farewell to our beloved students. We truly get to know and care about them as though they are family. We will miss their talents, personalities, and presence in our lives every day, but we are certain their collegiate years are just the beginning of our proverbial “family reunions” over coffee, lunch, zooms, emails, and drop-ins. We are incredibly proud of you, Lauren, Eleora, and Karli and cannot wait for opportunities to catch up over coffee in the future.

Zach Zimmer, Brandy Chaffee, and De'Shaun Diggs are all smiles as they are reunited at Commencement.

Because we also celebrated our 2020 graduates this year, a few faces in the lineup brought literal tears to my eyes. When the pandemic caused our students to go online and many campus employees to go home, there were so many goodbyes left unsaid. Zach, De’Shaun, Deaira, and Bruno were among our 2020 grads who quietly departed campus as we did. To my surprise, when I saw their faces during the ceremony, it was like seeing loved ones, nieces and nephews, for the first time in forever. What a joyous moment! And then I knew, they truly were ok.

As I wrote this letter, a wonderful thing occurred. Looking up from my laptop through the window of my tiny vintage camper, situated on an even tinier lake in northwest Minnesota, two graceful swans glide by. I quickly searched the symbolic meaning of swan, as I am a self-proclaimed seeker of the meaning and truth to all things in life. (“I want the truth! You can’t handle the truth!” Yes, I can, Google, please tell me!) Let’s just say seeking truth ranks at the top of my obsessions list, just as is quoting from my favorite movies or song lyrics. According to the website *World Birds, Joy of Nature*, the meaning of a swan is grace, beauty, love, trust, and loyalty.

As you may know, for more than a year, our University and Alumni Relations team, along with many of our colleagues across the campus worked from home. Others, who were essential for keeping the campus literally and figuratively online, especially through the early, and might I boldly say toughest months of the pandemic, were stationed on campus. We were, for the lack of better terms, ripped apart and sent in varying directions - indefinitely. This, along with being separated from our students, was not so easy. Good news, we are getting back to a semblance of normalcy with campus events this summer and we may fully head back to our offices, reconvening with our colleagues and friends at UMN Crookston in August.

So, how does this mesh with the symbolic meaning of the swan? It’s the literal context which gives me hope, because through these past many months, it was the giving and receiving of grace from our families, friends, and co-workers that held us up through the transitions and uncertainty. It was the beauty of love shown to others in times of need, struggle, sadness, and worry we could rise above shaken confidence, unanticipated conflict, or challenges. It was an exchange of trust between students, faculty, and staff creating an unwavering sense of purpose which guided decisions and kept them (and us) showing up each day. And, it was the loyalty of our alumni, donors, and friends reminding us how humanity, generosity, and human connections matter in ways we may never have known previous to 2020.

My wish is that the elements of a swan will remain, at not only top of mind, but at top of heart, and continue to grow in strength, infused and cemented in each of us over time. It is possible. As poignantly and passionately stated in the 2021 commencement address by 2013 alumnus Wemimo Abbey, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

With warmest regards,

Brandy

Brandy (Lietz) Chaffee 2000
Director and Chief Development Officer
University and Alumni Relations

#UMNproud #WingsUp #IAmCrookston

ALUMNI FEATURE STORIES

James Sparkman 2014

Software Engineering

Written by Shawn Smith, Director of Athletic Comm./Interim Asst. Director of Comm.

Whether it was adversity faced on the court, his injury, or his time within the software engineering program, he felt he was ready to embark on a career because of his experience as a Golden Eagle.

Turning a negative into a positive. Today, UMN Crookston alumnus James Sparkman 2014 makes a living on strategically implementing processes, navigating problems, and finding solutions for the betterment of the company. For Sparkman, he has been problem solving and turning a negative into a positive for years. As a junior at UMN Crookston, Sparkman saw his basketball career come to a close after not one, but two ACL injuries derailed his plans. But the Ypsilanti, Mich., native has risen up out of a gloomy ending to his basketball journey and built a profession for himself in software engineering.

Sparkman originally embarked on a position as a software engineer for St. Jude Medical, now Abbott, once he received his degree from the University of Minnesota Crookston. The degree helped get his foot in the door, but it has been the work he has done as a leader and problem solver that has defined a career on the rise.

“Throughout the last six-plus years, I worked my way up from being an entry-level engineer where I did a lot of implementation and coding,” Sparkman stated. “I moved into leadership roles within that organization starting in project management, where I was assigned to different projects working with various project teams to help them be more efficient. I worked to a program level where I had multiple projects under my belt.”

Sparkman worked mostly with software engineering in the medical devices field before Target contacted him needing someone on the software side to fill a gap in their team. “Target reached out and thought it was a good role for me,” Sparkman stated. “I took the knowledge I gained from the program management experience and with software and have been able to pair it with the business side of solving problems and taking a strategic leadership view of the processes in the company.”

The role as a lead process engineer with Target is different from the other jobs he has held. “I sit in a unique organization in Target,” Sparkman said. “The role I am in currently, related to operations, is not the way you would normally view it. A portion of the job is operations, but strategy and implementation is the

other side. It is a very different role than I am used to. I have a degree in software engineering and my prior roles have been in software engineering and medical devices."

Sparkman has thoroughly enjoyed his time at Target, a role he began in August 2020. It has been a new challenge for him and has built on his previous experiences at Abbott with project and program management. "I look at different processes within the business and try to make them more efficient," Sparkman remarked. "With my software knowledge, I usually get assigned to systems and processes that are deeply involved with software and go through problem solving with the stakeholders in the business. This could be writing a purchase order for a vendor, sending that purchase order out of a distribution center, and all of the software that goes into that process ensuring we have the right quality, quantities, and product. If there is a gap in one of those processes, usually software processes, I work with those teams to document the process, where we currently are, and the dollar amount or opportunity we are losing and assist the teams and bring them together across the business. Each of the teams is usually focused on their daily tasks or their portion of the business and I connect that full line to solve the bigger problems and the strategic initiatives we have going on."

Sparkman's time at UMN Crookston prepared him for his current role. Whether it was adversity faced on the basketball court, his injury, or his time within the software engineering program, he felt he was ready to embark on a career because of his experience as a Golden Eagle. "Knowing and being able to test and build software is what got me in the door and prepared me to know the business structure that goes around creating a product. I don't think a lot of junior engineers know much more outside of coding and testing that goes into software engineering. The one that piqued my interest is project management and dealing with timelines and budgets and being able to connect people together. That, along with my time in basketball, helped give me more of a connective and full life cycle view of software engineering. It has continued to help me throughout my career even now at Target," Sparkman stated.

He reflects fondly on his experience at UMN Crookston, especially how the professors would work one-on-one with students and make sure they were set up for success. "For me, being in software engineering and playing basketball, professors were really good if I was out of town and they would take time outside of class to help you out," Sparkman commented. "Many of my friends who I played basketball with in Montana went on to larger schools with 300 people in a class. They didn't get one-on-one attention and struggled getting through some things. Being able to have those conversations with professors really helped along with knowing the leadership at your school. I don't think there was a leader on campus I didn't know and felt comfortable talking to."

Enduring tough losses and injury on the basketball court may have been difficult. Being able to reflect on the negatives and build on the positives, along with the lifelong bond he created with teammates made it an experience that helped set him up for his career. "I was involved in sports for a very long time, but being able to go through the ups and downs with the team and being able to take some of the negative things that happened and reflect on those and make them into positives as much as you can," Sparkman said. "Outside of getting through those things you build relationships. It is exactly the same when you go to a work environment. You have time when you are building relationships, but you also have times when the work gets tough and when you don't agree, and it helps you work through the relationship building of getting through problems, reflecting on those problems, and learning from them which has helped me a ton."

Sparkman had a tough end to his basketball career, suffering his second ACL injury in the second-to-last game of his junior season in what would end up being a big win over St. Cloud State University. He still reflects on his time fondly and has remained close to many of his teammates. “I attended the weddings of Almir Krdzalic 2014 and Broderick Schmidt 2013 and I see Abdou Niang 2014 usually once a year. Tomas Parker 2015 works for Target as well, and I saw Ashton Harrell 2014 when he came to Minnesota before COVID hit. I talk to Dominique Wright some. We had a big group come back for a reunion three or four years ago. It was fun.”

Sparkman has maintained friendships with people outside of the basketball team, including former football player Joe Stearly 2013, and many others who he has still remained in contact with since graduating. “My fondest memory is hanging out with the guys,” Sparkman said. “We had a pretty crazy group who were hilarious. Between Almir and Bo and really everyone had their own unique personalities. Having a close-knit group of guys where we went through what I would say is really rough times of losing a lot of games, but still made it a great atmosphere and great fun.”

He has come a long way in his career, rising up the ranks from his time at Abbott and now on to Target. While he has had a lot of great memories in the workforce, it is still his time at Abbott and working on Abbott’s Cardiac Mapping System, a software which helps create 3D models based on the anatomy of the cardiac chamber of the patient. “My senior leadership team at Abbott had the faith to pull me in and ask if I was interested in a new role putting me in a position where I lead multiple teams.” Sparkman remarked. That, and seeing the product we put out, for instance, the EnSite™ Velocity™ which helps with heart surgeries for people who have atrial fibrillation, along with having some of the patients who we helped change their life through that product come in and talk to us were some of the best moments of my career of our work as a team being appreciated.”

Sparkman has had an outstanding start to his career and wants to continue to rise up as a leader, eventually becoming a senior vice president or a member of a leadership team. He has big career ambitions and it all started at the University of Minnesota Crookston, rising out of adversity, and finding the positive and making the most of an experience.

Judy Streiffel-Reller 1983

Fashion Merchandising and Retail Management

Written by Lauren Wallace, senior, marketing and sport & recreation management; Bloomington, Minn.

“UMN Crookston was the key part of my journey of self-discovery and my personal branding.”

Judy Streifel-Reller “Grace Ann” attended the University of Minnesota Crookston and studied fashion merchandising and retail management from 1981 to 1983. She learned about the university when a recruiter from the admissions office, Jack

Bywater visited her high school in central North Dakota. He energetically told her she'd fit in on campus, so she signed up for a visit and ultimately registered for classes. Her transition from high school to college was a pivotal point in her life, as she took on leadership roles and had to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. "UMN Crookston was the key part of my journey of self-discovery and my personal branding," Streifel-Reller said. She developed essential core skills in public speaking, project management, conflict management, impromptu speaking, creative problem solving, and team building.

Streifel-Reller wasn't always as scholarly and focused as she is today. She actually chose a two-year program because she knew her study skills weren't very strong. Going into algebra, she knew she was going to need help. Her professor, Bill Peterson tutored her while she was in the course and never shamed her for lack of understanding. He took Streifel-Reller where she was at and helped her continue to learn. "If I wouldn't have gone to UMN Crookston and been impacted by those experiences, I don't think I ever would've gone on to get my bachelor's degree, master's degree, and completion of doctoral level courses," she said.

As for fashion merchandising, Streifel-Reller had an abundance of unique learning opportunities. They held fashion shows featuring clothing from downtown Crookston or Grand Forks, N.D. The large windows in the business conference room were utilized as mock displays for storefronts and they had the opportunity to study and sometimes try on the historic costume collection full of period to 100-year-old garments. They even went to New York City for a fashion field trip. She was also involved in collegiate Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) as a state officer and apparel and accessories event competitor. One year, they went to Texas for nationals travelling in 15-passenger vans, stopping at Niagara Falls on the way. Streifel-Reller would love to give a shout out to her fellow fashion merchandising majors and DECA team members. She had a lot of fun experiences on campus such as hanging out with friends in Bede Lounge, watching hockey games in the packed arena, going to dances in Bede Ballroom, and enjoying seven-course meals prepared and served by hotel restaurant management students.

Judy Streiffel-Reller and her family

After her two years at UMN Crookston, she went to work at a store in fashion merchandising and management. Whether she was running a meeting, showing a coworker how to complete a task, or demonstrating how to wear something for a customer, Streifel-Reller noticed she was doing a lot of teaching. This is when she realized her passion and went on to get her bachelor's degree in marketing education. She completed her student teaching in a high school and her first teaching job was at a technical college in South Dakota. This ultimately led her back to the University of North Dakota (UND) where she became a graduate teaching assistant and earned her master's degree in career and technical education. "I saw exemplary teaching at UMN Crookston, which made me think I could make a difference in someone's life if I was a teacher," she said. Streifel-Reller ended up coming back to UMN Crookston to teach and advise students in the business division from 1989 to 1992. Based upon her master's degree in independent study of research of top U.S. post-secondary fashion merchandising programs, she put her own personal mark on the fashion

merchandising program. She viewed courses from an industry trends and student perspective, combined those that made sense together, and eliminated those that no longer served the program. This full circle experience bettered the University and allowed her to give back to the place where she learned so much.

From this point on, Streifel-Reller has continued to career pivot through multiple roles in a variety of settings, which have included: management in a retail environment; a human resources business advisor at a multi-state gas and electric utility company; working in the K-12 school setting; a faculty member and staff development coordinator in higher education; she worked as a regional education association director; was a talent development director at a regional accounting firm; and now she is a solopreneur, where she focuses on organizational ecosystems, talent development and social leadership, and inspired philanthropy for transformational consulting. With an ongoing belief in community stewardship, Streifel-Reller also co-founded a women's leadership cooperative with eight other women in Grand Forks. They are in their third year and have about 85 members. She is the philanthropy director and their goal is to provide a holistic approach to leadership and well-being.

Judy Streiffel-Reller conducting a yoga "tree pose" in front of beautiful mountain scenery.

Another success Streifel-Reller is proud of is quite the theatrical accomplishment. She auditioned for the musical, Fiddler on the Roof, in 2018. At the audition, Streifel-Reller emphasized she didn't know how to sing but completed the dancing portion and the group song. As people were packing up, the director stopped her and said, "Hey, I didn't hear you sing!" Upon agreement, Streifel-Reller kept it simple and sang "Happy Birthday", nerves and all. The director started laughing, and it wasn't until she got home and explained everything to her husband that she realized she had been singing the Marilyn Monroe version of happy birthday. Based on this crazy but entertaining performance, she got a part in Fiddler on the Roof and was able to cross something off her bucket list. Aside from her occasional outburst in song, Streifel-Reller has a new fondness for pickleball, has a daily yoga and meditation practice, utilizes integrative health, is an organic gardener, and has a goal to complete a yoga tree pose in every US National Park.

Today, Streifel-Reller serves on the University of Minnesota Crookston Campus Advisory and Advancement Board (CAAB) and is grateful to have the opportunity to support the overall mission of the campus. She is an empty nester and proud and blessed parent of three adventuresome, career-minded young adults. As a lifelong learner, she takes part in weekly webinars, is studying Theory U by taking classes through MIT's Presencing Institute, participates in online book studies, is focusing on building her listening skills, learning conscious business approaches, and practices daily gratitude. One of Streifel-Reller's mottos is, "It's a big world, small world." Networking and establishing positive connections with others allows for future reconnections that may lead to personal or professional opportunity. For example, fellow alumna Kimberly Clark 1983 was a friend she met in Crookston and has been a high school teacher for all three of her children, and now they serve on CAAB together. Overall, Streifel-Reller has been on a journey of personal transformation from the moment she stepped foot on UMN Crookston's campus.

Allan Brandli and his wife Nancy

Allan Brandli 1957

Northwest School of Agriculture

Written by Lauren Wallace, senior, marketing and sport & recreation management; Bloomington, Minn.

His life has come full circle after the many learning experiences as a young man at the NWSA.

In 1953, a young man was dropped off at Selvig Hall. He was placed in a dorm room with three other guys he didn't know and said goodbye to his parents, knowing the only way he'd be able to reach them was by writing a letter or placing a collect call with the dorm phone. This young man was Allan Brandli (1953-1957) from Warroad, Minn. His father and a few aunts and uncles attended the Northwest School of Agriculture (NWSA), but Brandli had never seen campus until he was already registered.

He remembers it being a primarily male environment at the time, with 100 boys in his graduating class and only ten girls. Campus looks different now, as there used to be a faculty dorm and a pool, with no sidewalks in sight.

The school year was based on a farmer's schedule, from October to March, with a project during the summer. He took specialty classes like welding and carpentry along with regular subjects such as English, math, and history. He also became the assistant editor of the school newspaper. Senior year, he took an aeronautics class taught by Gene Miller, M.A. During the spring, Miller brought each student on an individual flight. This was an opportunity to witness a plane in action where they flew over the Crookston area and got a tour of the city. Brandli considers this a standout experience from his time at NWSA and something he remembers fondly. He also enjoyed his typing course because he has been able to use that skill all of his life.

Within a month of graduating from the NWSA, Brandli joined the Navy on April 27, 1957. He spent four years on active duty as an aviation electronics technician and spent time aboard an aircraft carrier as an electronics instructor in San Diego, Calif., and in the reserves. In 1958, Brandli was a crew member on the aircraft carrier USS Bennington VCA-20. He stated, "We were in Pearl Harbor on Memorial Day 1958. As a tribute to the 1,177 sailors and marines that were killed when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941, they had 1,177 of us spell out the Arizona on our flight deck. I am one of those who is standing in the 'R'. You can see the remains of the battleship Arizona in the water alongside us. This was before the current memorial was built and Hawaii was still a territory."

Allan Brandli (part of the letter R) on the USS Bennington as it passes the wreck of USS Arizona on Memorial Day, 1958

Brandli retired as a Navy commander after 26 years of service. Within that time, Brandli attended Concordia Moorhead, where he earned his bachelor's degrees in physics and education, the University of Nebraska for a master's degree in physics, and the University of Houston for his master's in business administration. In 1967, he had the rare opportunity of working for NASA Mission Control at Johnson Space Center during the Apollo program. He joined their engineering directorate and worked on the onboard computer system for the space shuttle. He worked on development and testing, and got ready for the first flight, Apollo 11. This enabled him to work with computers at the forefront of technology. It was the first time a vehicle could land back on the runway, and this technology was developed during his time there. Brandli is filled with pride knowing what is going on with space now is built upon what he contributed to in the 1980s. After that, he worked with international space until the early 1990s and retired in 1994.

Along with his intensive education and career path, he raised a family. It was a joy for him to educate his children as they grew up, going through fun activities such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Since retiring in 1994, he and his wife have been living in Liberty, Texas on three and a half acres of land. Both have become active in the community through various programs, such as AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), the Rotary Club, and have been part of the Texas Master Gardener program for the last 20 years.

Brandli recognizes how his agricultural background from NWSA has been beneficial for him as they educate others about "growing green" through the Texas A&M Extension office. It has all come full circle, as Brandli went from being an Aggie at the NWSA to being an Aggie as a member of Extension at Texas A&M. Brandli also worked at the local library for 20 years during story time, where he would read a book and lead a craft for young kids, who know him as "Mr. Al".

As for hobbies, Brandli enjoys applying the skills he learned at the NWSA and practices carpentry, woodworking, gardening, and photography. He also continues to work with technology. When he was learning technology as it was introduced in the 1950s and 1960s, he didn't know how it was going to be used. He now has his iPhone, iPad, iMac, and television that allows him to access the whole world from out in the woods in southeast Texas. This past March, Brandli's daughter and her two daughters moved in with him. It's been a while since he has lived with so many females, and it has been a fun adjustment as they came from city living. This living arrangement allows Brandli to help them experience living in the country and learn the importance of agriculture. This is another area where he feels his life has come full circle, as he got these same learning experiences as a young man at the Northwest School of Agriculture.

Allan Brandli and his family

Campus Tour

Haven't been to campus lately, take a video tour!

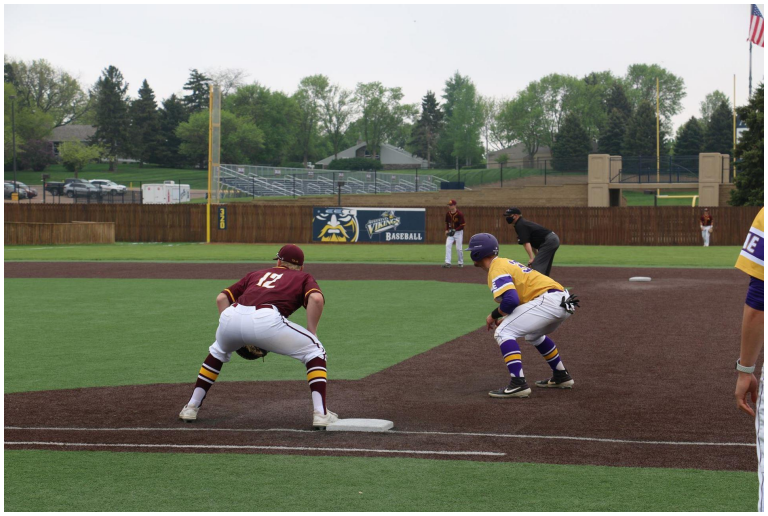
ATHLETICS UPDATE

Baseball

The UMN Crookston baseball team is in the midst of their fifth-ever NSIC Tournament and their fourth since 2016. The Golden Eagles picked up their first-ever win in the NSIC Tournament with a come-from-behind 10-6 victory over Minot State University in Minot, N.D., May 13. Minnesota Crookston has had their best season in terms of win-percentage in 2021, with a 24-10 (18-10 NSIC) record and achieved their first-ever national ranking, reaching as high as No. 18 in the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association Poll (NCBWA). Minnesota Crookston started the season with an unprecedented 11-consecutive wins.

The Golden Eagles have been led by Mason Ruhlman, hitting .345, with a team-high 38 runs scored, 10 doubles, one triple, 10 home runs, and 33 RBIs. In addition, Brock Reller is batting .317 with 33 runs scored, six doubles, four triples, a team-high 14 home runs and 43 RBIs. UMN Crookston has shattered their previous record as a team with 62 home runs in 2021. The previous record was 37 set during the 2016 season.

On the mound, Minnesota Crookston has been guided by Jake Dykhoff, who is 5-0 with a 3.44 ERA with four complete games, 76 strikeouts, and 14 walks. Out of the bullpen, Brody Sorenson has made an immediate impact as a true freshman. Sorenson has six saves, with a 2.96 ERA, and 13 strikeouts.



Minnesota Crookston Falls to Top-Seed Minnesota State 15-9 at NSIC Tournament

Top-seeded Minnesota State University, Mankato scored 11 unearned runs as UMN Crookston had two costly errors in the game, falling 15-9. The Mavericks were guided by a grand slam by Ty Denzer in the bottom of the seventh. Minnesota Crookston had trimmed the deficit to 7-5 in the top of the seventh, but Minnesota State tallied five runs in the seventh frame and three in the eighth to help secure the victory. Minnesota Crookston attempted a ninth inning comeback with a three-run home run by Will Zimmerman (R-Sr., OF, Park River, N.D.) and a solo shot from Jake Hjelle (R-Fr., 1B, East Grand Forks, Minn.).

[NSIC Tourney Game Recap and Story]

Minnesota Crookston Baseball Player Ben Thoma earns NSIC Elite 18 Award for baseball

Minnesota Crookston's Ben Thoma was named the 2021 NSIC Elite 18 Award winner for baseball. Thoma was presented the award prior to the Golden Eagles game against Minnesota State in the NSIC Baseball Tournament, which is taking place Wednesday-Friday at the Karras Park at Ronken Field in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Thoma is the first Golden Eagle to earn the NSIC Elite 18 Award since its inception in 2016-17.

[Read More About Thoma's Elite 18 Award]

Softball

The Minnesota Crookston softball team recently concluded the 2021 season. UMN Crookston had a 10-32 (6-22 NSIC) and marks the fourth time they have reached 10 or more wins since 2016. The Golden Eagles were led by Dana Zarn, who hit .325, with 21 runs scored, four doubles, three home runs, and 14 RBIs. Jordan Peterson hit .303 with 13 runs scored, five doubles, two home runs, and nine RBIs. In addition, Cassie Querry hit .265 with six home runs, and 22 RBIs.

In the circle, Katie Humhej made an immediate impact after transferring from Long Island University-Post, where she helped lead her team to the Division II World Series. Humhej went 6-14 with a 3.13 ERA. Humhej set the school-record for ERA in a career, and strikeouts in a season and pitched the program's first-ever perfect game. Humhej had 131 of the team's 205 strikeouts for the 2021 season.

At the conclusion of the season, Head Coach Travis Owen resigned his post after three seasons to pursue other opportunities. Owen had 29 wins in three years and helped to develop two of the program's best pitchers all-time in Humhej and Paige Pitlick.

Equestrian

The Minnesota Crookston equestrian team had another strong season in 2021. The hunt seat equestrian team claimed their third-straight IHSA Regional Championship. In addition, Rachel Johnson claimed honors as the region's top open rider, earning the Cacchione Cup. The western team also had an outstanding season with six riders qualifying for the IHSA Regional Championship. Tristyn Bair led the team by placing first in Level I Horsemanship, while Jordyn Newberg took second in Open Reining.

The Golden Eagles finished up the season at the Collegiate Equitation Invitational placing third at the event in St. Mary's, Ind. In the team portion of the competition, Johnson took first in Open Fences, while Ashleigh Lueder took second in Introductory Flat. In the individual portion, Johnson placed second in Open Fences. On the flat, Morgan Schelske placed second in Open Flat.

Softball

The Golden Eagle softball team is set to open the 2021 season February 10 with games against Bemidji State University and University of Jamestown in West St. Paul, Minn. UMN Crookston was picked to finish 14th in the NSIC. The Golden Eagles will play 44 games during the 2021 season.

Men's Golf

The Minnesota Crookston men's golf team concluded the season by putting up their highest placing in the NSIC Men's Golf Championship since 2014 taking eighth place. Connor Humble placed 17th with rounds of 75, 77, and 76 and has placed in the Top 20 of the NSIC Tournament three times in his career. Cade Pederson had a strong debut, as the redshirt freshman placed in a tie for 23rd. The Golden Eagles have a strong core returning for the 2021-22 season.

Women's Golf

The Golden Eagle women's golf team placed 11th at the NSIC Women's Golf Championship in Morton, Minn. The placing is their highest since the 2015-16 season. Minnesota Crookston was guided by Ellen Solem, who placed in a tie for 34th, while junior college transfer Abby Stender took 38th. Solem's first-round score of 82 was the lowest in a NSIC Women's Golf Championship for a Golden Eagle golfer since Katie Sheetz shot 81 during the 2014-15 Championship.

Women's Tennis

The Minnesota Crookston women's tennis team continued to show improvement throughout the 2021 season. They were led by Tasha Achermann at the No. 1 singles spot and Michelle Swyter at the No. 2 slot. The pair also played No. 1 doubles. The Golden Eagles graduated seniors Karli Renney and Samantha Hartung.

FACULTY FEATURE

Christine Bakke

Lecturer, Math, Science and Technology

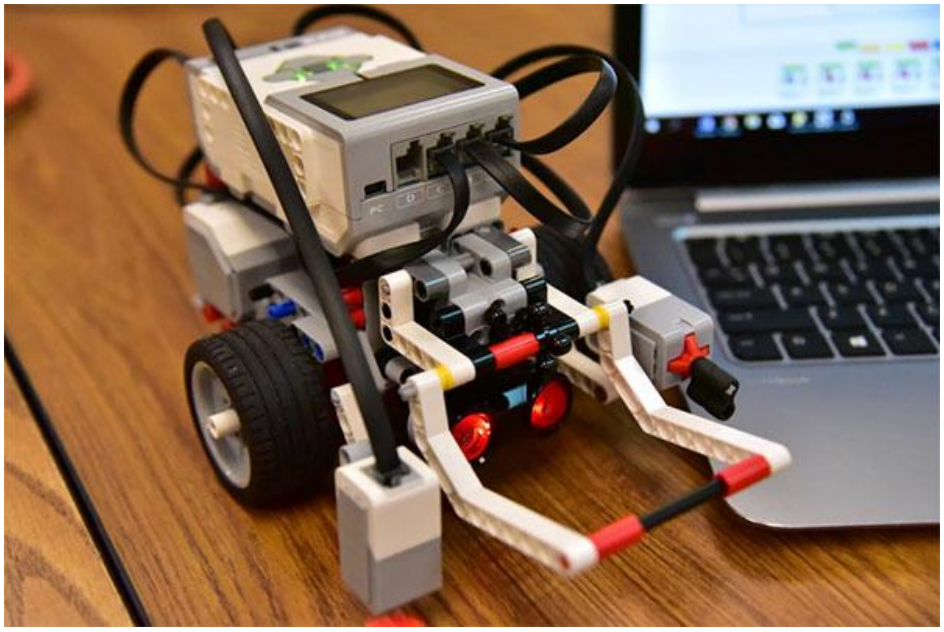
Written by Nan Thurston, Online Student Services Professional and Christine Bakke, Lecturer

In Northern Minnesota, it is not uncommon to have threads linking us together, and this story is one of them. It includes a faculty member, current students, alumni, and an area business working together to provide excellent educational opportunities for the University of Minnesota Crookston's software engineering students.

Department Chair, Venugopal Mukku, Ph.D., provided this insight on our featured faculty member.

Christine Bakke, Ph.D., joined UMN Crookston in 2015 after obtaining a doctorate in information technology from Capella University in 2013. Her dissertation focused on higher education and the importance of technology and engineering education. Currently, she is teaching courses in information technology management and software engineering. She is passionate about her advisees and is devoted

to preparing them to graduate, ready to pursue their dreams. UMN Crookston acknowledged her dedication to student access and success by presenting her with the Access Achievement Award in 2017. In addition to her teaching, she takes on multiple active roles on campus, in the community, and abroad. Her passion for technology and engineering education for everyone has led to her role as director of robotics and technology camps at UMN Crookston. Bakke's expertise and interests are diverse and she describes her experience as 'all things IT'. She enjoys programming projects in the classroom and beyond, with special interests in creative works research. Some of her favorite projects with students include smart home devices with custom apps, game development, artificial intelligence chatbots, and accessibility software."



Because hands-on projects that require education and experience were something she missed, Bakke found ways to incorporate applied projects, including outside of class projects that afforded students opportunities to work on real software products. These projects have provided UMN Crookston software engineering students opportunities to gain professional experience prior to graduation.

The intersection of student dreams, the real life experience of our faculty, and the legacy of our alumni come together. Bakke says, “A few years ago, I noticed one of our new students, Christopher Lang 2020, frequently volunteering for projects in the software engineering lab. I began to learn a bit about him, his likes and dislikes.” Lang had SpaceX emblazoned on his favorite sweatshirt and he often spoke of Mars and the stars. During a conversation about his goals, he mentioned he would like to work for SpaceX. Her thought was, “I knew of one former student, a family friend, who had experience in a space career. Ben Gunvalson had been offered a NASA internship after his robotics team won a national competition." Lang had a lot of robotics experience already, so Bakke recommended getting as much technical experience as he could to continue in the right direction to attain his goals of getting an internship at SpaceX.

With that idea in mind, Bakke knew projects became available through research grants, business requests, or as special requests from donors. It wasn’t long after the conversation with Lang when Tim and Jenny Slukynsky of Lamplighter Hockey came to the business department with a project that involved redesign of their existing product, developing a custom app and custom wiring. The project redesign and custom app had a lot of interest, but only Lang was willing to take on the custom wiring of an arduino. Over the course of one school year, the team progressed to the point where they could offer the client direction and provide them with several app designs and an improved project design, but there was not enough time to learn everything needed to customize and program the arduino. Although the team was disappointed the project was not fully completed, the company was happy and Lang gained valuable real world experience.

Lang continued to grow his resume with involvement in more projects that were available such as a custom Waste Watchers system for sustainability, working on the City of Crookston’s website, and working in the Undergraduate Collaborative Learning and Experiential Applied Research (UCLEAR) Lab - an immersive computer visualization and informatics lab suite. He became a member of the programming and drone teams, and was able to work on custom 3D printing projects and the virtual reality outreach. He applied and obtained funding through the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) working with Associate Professor Katy Chapman, Ph.D.

During his junior year, and with a more robust resume, Lang applied for every space related internship he could find. That summer, he was awarded an internship with NASA. Later, Lang informed Bakke NASA hired him for his arduino experience.

The story and connections continued. During his senior year, Lang was asked to be a student speaker at Torch & Shield. During the banquet, Bakke visited with Ben Gunvalson’s family who had a special connection to Lang’s story as their son had a similar experience at UMN Crookston. Bakke remembers, “Until attending the dinner, I had not realized Ben had a parent who was a UMC alum, and that Ben’s brother also attended UMC. Small world! It was fun to introduce John 1975 and Cheri Gunvalson and their son, Jacob, to Lang and they had an enjoyable evening chatting through the program and dinner.”

Lang brought Bakke a new client with a request for a project with many similarities to the one they had collaborated on with Lamplighter Hockey years before. Since Lang was near graduation, he could not participate as a student and requested to be part of the team and join remotely as a mentor. A sophomore student, Jacob Boothroyd, volunteered and university funding was secured through a UROP grant allowing Boothroyd to be funded while he worked to solve the new project.

Lang and Boothroyd met with Bakke regularly in the fall via Zoom. Boothroyd enjoyed a jump start because the project was similar to the original Lamplighter project. With Lang and Bakke's prior history on the project, Boothroyd built on their experiences. This time a working prototype was completed in a single semester.

As they worked through the new project Bakke would occasionally mention Lamplighter Hockey and wondered if they found someone to complete the electrical arduino portion of their project. With a prototype in hand, the team discussed the possibility of returning to the Lamplighter project next fall with both Boothroyd (currently a junior) and Lang expressing interest. Bakke contacted Slukynskys to determine if they were interested in continuing the students previous work. They quickly responded stating they would be willing to work with them once again.

The start of every academic year brings new adventures. Challenging and uncertain projects provide opportunities for students to customize their education and chase their dreams allowing the University of Minnesota Crookston to set the stage for student success. Bakke knows that with support from businesses, alumni, and the University of Minnesota there will continue to be opportunities for students to explore projects that help them pursue their dreams.

A sincere thank you goes out from Bakke and her students to area businesses and alumni who have provided these opportunities, and to the university for providing grants to support experiential research projects. Bakke shares, "I find myself in a position where I am grateful to a community, to alumni, and to the University of Minnesota Crookston for providing connections and resources that allow our students to participate in real projects."

Math, Science and Technology

The Math, Science and Technology (MST) Department is pleased to reach out with an update to our friends and alumni through this edition of the Torchlight. As the division head, I can say the department is one of the most active and dynamic on campus, and it is often difficult for us to keep up with the successes of our diverse students and faculty in the department. Even during the uncertainties and challenges brought about by the pandemic, MST has continued to serve our students very well in their professional development and placements after graduation (see our website for more information), and recently our faculty have won an impressive array of prestigious University of Minnesota System awards. Thanks are extended to Department Chair Venu Mukku Ph.D., for compiling this update, which is a small subsample of the extensive and exciting activities and successes we have seen in the MST Department.

Anthony Kern, Ph.D.
Professor
Division Head for Agriculture, Natural Science, and Technology

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MST Department Update

Venugopal Mukku, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Chemistry
Chair of Math, Science and Technology

The current academic year posed a significant challenge to teaching and learning as is typically understood. Despite the measures that were necessary for the safety of all students, staff, and faculty, my colleagues found innovative ways to offer lectures and laboratory sessions. As the pandemic year winds down and the vaccination drive continues to pick up steam, we are looking forward to a more 'normal' year for the upcoming academic year, pending no unforeseen circumstances.

AWARDS

In recent months, faculty in the department received many laurels. For the first time in the history of University of Minnesota Crookston, one of our colleagues, Anthony Schroeder, Ph.D., received the prestigious McKnight Land-Grant Professorship in 2020. The Schroeder lab provides broad research opportunities for undergraduates in two main research areas: 1) exploring the biology of freshwater sponges in Minnesota and 2) examining the molecular mechanisms underlying sexual development and the impacts of contaminants on development in reptiles. This research purposely involves many areas of biology such as molecular biology, genetics, and environmental stressors to provide undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue research in their specific biological field of interest.

The next award is a first for the MST Department. Timothy Dudley, Ph.D., received the Horace T. Morse-University of Minnesota Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education in 2021. Dudley is an associate professor teaching general chemistry lecture and lab courses. He is highly committed to providing a quality educational experience in chemistry for his students and is a dedicated adviser to students in the health science and medical lab science programs. His research focus is in computational organometallic chemistry, but engages undergraduate students in both computational and experimental research projects.

The final award won by MST faculty is for Global Engagement. Venu Mukku, Ph.D., received this award in 2019. The all-University award is given to current faculty and staff in recognition of outstanding contributions to global education, global competency, cultural understanding and/or international programs at the University.

RESEARCH

The Association of American Colleges and Universities includes undergraduate research as one of the ten High Impact Educational Practices and many faculty in the department continue to offer research opportunities to students. Many students are taking advantage of these research opportunities and boosting their resumes. Some of them are presenting their research at regional or national conferences. An example would be Hongkai Chen who will present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in April 2021. Many MST graduates are being accepted into professional programs. The success of our students directly or indirectly affects the professional growth of our faculty. A case in point is the election of two faculty members, Katy Chapman, Ph.D. and Venu Mukku to the Biology and Chemistry Divisions of the Council on Undergraduate Research.

RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

University of Minnesota Crookston, State of Minnesota, and University of Minnesota Twin Cities have invested heavily in modernizing the research infrastructure. In 2018, we opened the Center for Collaborative Research, which is equipped with advanced instrumentation. Subsequently, another research area is getting ready and we hope to make it operational by August 2021. These facilities will provide bench space for 20 students to work on different projects simultaneously.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Katy Chapman, Ph.D., and Brian Dingmann, Ph.D., were among the first from our campus who participated in the system-wide Internationalization of Teaching and Learning initiative. In addition to that initiative, faculty were also working to bring international scholars to campus. Last year, we had two Fulbright scholars on our campus. Kennedy Nyongbela, Ph.D., senior lecturer, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon, visited and taught at our campus as a Fulbright Scholar-In-Residence and Kahirou Diakite, PhD., University of Bamako, Mali, visited Crookston to study the adsorption of dyes on Tilemsi rock phosphate. The Fulbright organization sponsored Diakite.

International Collaborations: One of our faculty members, Karl Anderson was part of an international team (located in Australia, Canada, Benin, and Togo) which won the University of Newcastle's Grand Challenge in August 2020. The team is working to reduce the health risks that certain species of mosquitoes pose to humans and lessen the nuisance factor imposed by urban and invading mosquito populations.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Office of Sustainability in collaboration with the Math, Science and Technology Department recently added a sustainability minor to the curricular options at UMN Crookston. This minor will allow students from across campus to engage in sustainability work and will promote a broader understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This minor will be available both on-campus and online. The Office of Sustainability also recently began a new water bottle program in collaboration with the vice-chancellor for student affairs, orientation programs, and the Wellness Center. This program not only encourages utilizing reusable water bottles but also tracks hydration and encourages users to stay hydrated throughout the day. The Office of Sustainability hosted a MN GreenCorp member during the 2019-2020 academic year during which we launched the UMN Crookston composting program. Since the inception of that program, we have diverted 2.61 tons of organics from the landfill. The Office of Sustainability also received a grant from the Clean Energy Resource Team (CERTS) to complete design work on Dowell Hall which will install LED lights and occupancy sensors in the remaining classrooms of Dowell Hall when completed. This project is expected to save the University $5,607 annually. The Office of Sustainability is also engaging in a geothermal feasibility study for the Crookston campus in collaboration with Ottertail Energy and Geo Optimize. Crookston is hosting the Sustainability Education and Leadership Forum (SELFsustain) in the spring of 2021 with a focus on indigenous identity, community, and sustainability. The final event will be on April 15, with the keynote speaker available to the general community from 12-1 p.m. Pre-register at z.umn.edu/SELFsustain2021.

ARRIVALS

Tamara Luna (2010) welcomed baby Ophelia Cassandra Nelson in December 2020. Amber (Suchy) Koep (2015) was blessed with twins, Kelsey Marie and Aubrey Mae in March 2021.

OBITUARY

We are extremely saddened Cleon Melsa, Ph.D., passed away recently. He provided invaluable service to the University and community for over 40 years.

BUILD A LASTING *Legacy*

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

What's Your Story

We want to hear about your experiences at UMN Crookston or NWSA and how they have made an impact on your life.

[Tell Us]

Then & Now Photos

Send us your photos from when you were on campus to where you are at now. We'd love to feature you in the next newsletter.

[Submit Photos]

Update Your Info

We'd love to stay in touch with you. Please help us do so by updating your contact info.

[Update Now]

I Am Crookston Marketing Campaign

CAMPUS HAPPENINGS

June 10, 2021

Mark Olsonawski Scholarship Golf Tournament
9 a.m. registration | Hallock, MN | Two River Golf Club

July 16, 2021

31st Annual Teambacker Golf Classic presented by Altru Health System
9 a.m. registration | register at z.umn.edu/teambackergc

August 17, 2021

Charles H. Casey Equine Arena Dedication
3:00 - 5:00 p.m. | UTOC

August 18, 2021

Retiree Recognition
9:30-11:30 a.m. | UTOC

August 19, 2021

NWSA Reunion
Time TBD | UMN Crookston

IN THE NEWS

UMN Crookston's degrees impact northwest Minnesota; graduates staying for the regional workforce

Graduates Impact Regional Workforce

Pair of UMN Crookston Students Named 2021 Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council's (MAELC) Minnesota Teach Ag Ambassadors

Ag Ed Students Recognized by MAELC

UMN transdisciplinary collaboration receives a $12,000 grant to create spaces, events and activities to showcase indigenous culture and the environment

[Awarded Indigenous Culture Showcase Grant]

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS PUBLICATIONS

Digital Archives

Dig deep into our new Crookston digital archive through the University of Minnesota's Digital Conservancy. Our collection includes: Aggie, Aggie Yearbook, Bulletin and Catalog, Commencement Programs, Commentator, Fourth Estate, New Student Directory, Northwest Monthly, Torch Magazine, Torchlight e-Newsletter, and more.

[Visit the Crookston Collection]

[How To: Navigate the Digital Conservancy (Video)]

LET'S BE SOCIAL

Check out our social media accounts!

>>> [UMN Crookston Event Calendar] <<<

The torch is a symbol of enlightenment used in faith, in the Olympics, and as part of our nation's Statue of Liberty. It's a sentiment our campus has used as a way of passing the responsibility and pride of our beloved institution to the next generation. Specifically, the torch has been passed to each class during commencement since 1968, illuminating the quality of education as well as the educational philosophy of the University of Minnesota.

Questions about our Torchlight e-Newsletter?
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